

Waukegan News Sun, December 10, 2004

DEERFIELD — More than 1,600 holiday cards and letters for troops in Iraq have been received by the office of U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, since he announced he would personally deliver them.

"The outpouring of support from friends and families serving in Iraq has simply been amazing," Kirk said Thursday. "My office received cards from as far away as West Virginia and North Carolina.

Kirk and a bipartisan delegation of a half-dozen congressmen led by Missouri Congressman Roy Blunt are going to Iraq "soon," said Matt Towson, a spokesman for Kirk.

The exact day of departure is not being disclosed because of "security reasons," Towson said. Troops should get the cards and letters before Christmas, he added.

The mail filled two big cardboard boxes Thursday in Kirk's Deerfield office.

"Nothing boosts the morale and spirits of Americans in uniform better than these letters from home," he said.

Kirk is going to Iraq with other members of Congress to evaluate the progress being made toward elections scheduled in January.

He said he would deliver the mail to the U.S. Army's central mail processing facility in Baghdad. The deadline for receiving the cards and letters was Thursday.

Kirk is a member of the House Armed Services Committee. He was part of a congressional diplomatic mission to Kuwait in November 2002 and, as a Navy Reserve lieutenant commander, flew on intelligence missions over Iraq in early 2000.

Kirk was on active duty in the Mideast for about three weeks in the spring of 2000. He was a member of the crew of a radar-jamming Prowler aircraft that flew missions over Iraq from Turkey.